University Press Publishing

CHESTER KERR

SIGNIFICANTLY THIS PAPER has been placed between trade book and text book publishing. As is true of Switzerland on the map of Europe, the area of university presses touches borders with two powerful neighbors, trades with both, shares the language of each, yet belongs to neither. It gained its independence several centuries ago and has managed to preserve it.

University press publishing has, of course, much in common with trade publishing. Scholarly houses buy their paper, cloth, and ink from the same sources, often use the same commercial book manufacturers and binders, rely on some of the same general review and advertising media, use essentially the same direct-mail facilities, and depend on many of the same wholesale and retail outlets for distribution. It is even true that a certain percentage, very likely small, of the books published by university presses could as well be brought out by trade houses, and vice-versa.

In the other direction, a certain percentage of university press titles, again quite small, could be labeled textbooks. In general, scholarly publishers leave textbook publishing to the commercial firms which are so well equipped to develop and distribute such books. But inevitably a few texts which begin with local use come out under university press imprints and of course many university press books have supplementary use as texts or collateral reading.

The bulk of the books brought out each year by American university presses are works of scholarship or the fruits thereof, books designed to assist in the dissemination of knowledge, not only among scholars but also among all educated people. "It is one of the noblest duties of a University to advance knowledge," said Daniel Coit Gilman, first president of Johns Hopkins in a report endorsing the function of publication at his new young university, "and to diffuse it not merely among those who can attend the daily lectures. . . . but far and wide." [1]

Mr. Kerr is Secretary, Yale University Press.

How far and how wide American university presses have succeeded in making the results of scholarship known and readily usable through books in the past eighty-odd years may be judged from some facts and figures. From 1869, when Andrew White set up the first American "university press" at Cornell, through 1957, the leading university presses on this continent have brought out approximately 25,000 titles.[2-4] In 1957, the rate of annual output reached almost 1300 or about 10 per cent of the total annual output of all publishers in the United States.[3] It should also be noted that of the books in print in the United States today, one out of every seven carries a university press imprint.[4] In addition, some 118 scholarly journals are currently handled by university presses. One more figure: the total sales volume of the leading university presses in 1957 topped $8,000,000, only a fraction of the total book sales volume for the United States but impressive for its rate of increase as a sum almost double that for the same group only ten years ago.[5]

Themselves scattered far and wide, the roster of American university presses today includes presses in every section of the United States, unlike the commercial houses who are largely concentrated on the eastern seaboard or in or around Chicago. Sizable scholarly publishing programs are now in force at the University of California and at Stanford; at Oklahoma, Texas, and North Carolina; at Chicago, Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin; at Cornell, Rutgers, Pennsylvania, Johns Hopkins, Columbia, Princeton, Harvard, and Yale. Smaller but growing programs are in force at another dozen institutions; one of the newest was organized as Wayne State University Press in 1956. The Association of American University Presses, which requires its members to publish at the rate of five new titles a year, now includes some forty presses, among them presses at the University of Hawaii and Toronto University. In size of annual output, the presses publishing more than fifty new books in 1957 were Harvard, Columbia, Yale, and Chicago, in that order, with California and Princeton close behind.[6]

Although President White is believed to have had the Oxford and Cambridge models in mind, the press he set up at Ithaca in 1869 was presented to his trustees as a project designed primarily to provide students of journalism with a workshop and the university with reduced printing costs, and on this basis the trustees of 1884 found it wanting and ordered it discontinued. White's friend Gilman had better luck at Johns Hopkins where two scholarly journals, the *American*

Journal of Mathematics and the *American Chemical Journal,* were founded in 1878 and 1879 respectively, and where The Johns Hopkins Press itself was formally established in 1890.[7] Similar efforts followed rapidly at Chicago and at Columbia and by the turn of the century these three publishing organizations were firmly launched to become the pioneer American university presses.

Presses were also launched in one form or another before the end of the nineteenth century at the state universities of Pennsylvania and California but it was not until the 1930's that either of these university presses assumed its present form. Meanwhile, three more private institutions entered book publishing: Princeton in 1905 under the influence of one of its devoted alumni, Charles Scribner, head of the distinguished publishing house; Yale in 1908 when G. P. Day and his famous brother Clarence persuaded the university to sponsor a publishing program; and Harvard in 1913 when such antecedents as a printing office and a publications agency were brought together at the instigation of C. C. Lane. Presses were set up soon after at Loyola University in Chicago, at New York University, and at the University of Illinois. Together with a few abortive organizations at other universities, this completed the roster of presses established in the first fifty years after the beginning at Cornell.

In those years a record of distinguished publishing was already in the making. No one disputed George Day when he rose before the Association of American Universities in New Haven in 1914 to make the claims that "the various associations affiliated with many of our American universities under the general title of university presses have fairly challenged attention everywhere by the results of their activities" and "there is very general interest not only in their purpose but also in the efficiency of the methods by which they seek to achieve this purpose." [8] Five years later the editor of the Authors League Bulletin prefaced a 1919 article on scholarly publishing with these remarks: "A new group of publishing houses is arising in this country following a successful and ancient English precedent. Presses connected with certain of our universities are undertaking the publication of scholarly books and some of them are so extending their lists that they have practically entered the general publishing field." [9] The article itself was by Paul Tomlinson, then manager of the Princeton University Press, who found the growing market for university press books an encouraging sign of the times, "one to promote confidence in the future." "Their opportunity," said Tomlinson, as the United States

stood ready to enter the 1920's, "is just as big as they want to make it."

To take advantage of this opportunity, new university presses sprouted all over the American landscape during the next two decades. Impressive establishments were set in motion, often out of older beginnings, at Stanford and the University of Washington, in New York at Fordham University, and at Chapel Hill where one of the first great regional presses was developed first by the librarian, L. R. Wilson, and then by the energetic, young W. T. Couch. Howard Odum's Institute for Research in Social Science helped provide the early lists for the University of North Carolina Press and generous outside financial support from the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Memorial helped the young press to its feet.

Equally impressive organizations came into being at the University of Minnesota where Margaret S. Harding became the first of several dynamic women to enter this branch of publishing and at the University of Oklahoma where W. B. Bizzell reaffirmed the Gilman doctrine and brought to the task a young Tulsa newspaperman and Rhodes scholar, J. A. Brandt. Other regional presses appeared at New Mexico and Louisiana State universities and at Durham, North Carolina, (soon after Trinity College became Duke University). The presses at Pennsylvania and Cornell were reactivated, the press at Berkeley, California, took on new dimensions, and a press was begun at Ann Arbor and another at Ames, Iowa, where the journalism school set up a printing plant which soon blossomed into a publishing organization. Other presses got their starts at Rutgers, at Southern Methodist, at Pittsburgh, at the University of Wisconsin, and at the University of Georgia. By 1939 the roster of healthy and flourishing presses had grown to a point where one critic called it the most notable development in book publishing since the turn of the century.[10] In this same period, it may be noted, the number of graduate students in American universities had grown from 5,831 to 106,119—and the end of rapid growth was not in sight in 1957.[11]

In 1931, a commercial publisher, Joseph Brewer, sounded a complaint that was to become heard increasingly, that it was growing harder and harder for a serious-minded trade house to issue serious works with only limited market possibilities and yet to make ends meet.[12] The day may be at hand, Brewer said, when the whole protection of knowledge and the preservation of works of scholarship must be turned over to university presses and other endowed publishing institutions. Brewer's article in *Publishers' Weekly* drew a series

of responses from scholarly publishers, among them one from Donald Bean, then director of the University of Chicago Press, who approved in principle the idea of transferring this responsibility but was not willing to let the commercial publishers entirely off the hook and warned that university presses would need more funds, more experience, and more efficiency in their operations before they could assume even a sizable share of the burden.[13]

At least another half dozen new presses took shape during the 1940's and the older ones grew in stature, tested first by the war and then by the wave of expansion which swept American universities in the first years of peace. The moat between the academic world and the lay world had been bridged and more and more university presses set out to serve, as one director put it, "not only the scholarly world but the world in which the scholar lives." [14]

It can be seen from this brief history of American scholarly publishing that university presses in this country come in all sizes and shapes, are located in all parts of the nation, and are attached to all kinds of institutions. The links which attach them to their parent institutions are of several kinds but it may be said that in all cases the attachment is real; the universities whose names they bear retain responsibility for these organizations even in cases where the presses enjoy separate corporate status. In two out of three cases, this responsibility is administered through a control board or committee to whom the director is responsible in the first instance; in the rest, he answers directly to the university administration.[15] All forty presses belonging to the Association of American University Presses are non-profit organizations and enjoy exemption from federal income taxes.[16] Only a little over half of them enjoy the privilege of keeping their own accounts in the accepted publishing pattern; the others must depend on the accounting procedures of their universities, with or without some modification.

In all but three cases (Loyola, Michigan State, and Oklahoma) the power to accept a manuscript is vested either directly in an editorial committee or in a director who accepts the veto power of such a committee.[15] Customarily, such committees are made up of local faculty members and/or members of the university administration. Many of these committees are working committees, that is, their members read manuscripts, and of course readers' reports from outside the committee and from outside the university are in wide use. These

procedures often mean that an author must wait longer for a decision from a university press than he would from a trade house, but at the same time if his manuscript is accepted he may take satisfaction that it has already run the gantlet of some of his peers before review copies are even ready to be sent out. He may also secure valuable advice or suggestions about revisions. The majority of university presses take their responsibility seriously to maintain critical standards of writing, either by refusing certain books, even when these may come from scholars of repute in their own communities, or by improving them through constructive editorial advice and assistance.

University presses have also been at pains in recent years to smooth the relationship with their authors by offering lectures or seminars on the techniques of publishing, or turning out manuals, brochures, style guides, and reports to their faculty. The process of providing scholars with a knowledge of publishing, of what is expected of them, and what they may expect of the publisher, is a never-ending one. No press, especially one that calls its shots as it sees them ever enjoys the unstinting admiration of the entire academic community it serves, but an increasing number of scholars are taking advantage of competent and professional publishing services and in so doing are improving their chances of communicating the results of their research to the world.

Once his manuscript has been accepted by a university press, the scholar may or may not be reimbursed. About 30 per cent of the books published in recent years by American university presses have been royalty-free, while in the case of another 55 per cent royalties were paid, either from the beginning or after enough copies have been sold to permit the press to recover its manufacturing costs. In other cases, (amounting to about 12 per cent), the author retained title to the publication rights and in effect commissioned the press to manufacture and distribute his book; this custom, which has been practiced heavily by a few presses, is happily beginning to disappear.

The whole problem of author subsidies has been greatly eased in recent years by the growing realization on the part of universities that they cannot fairly require their scholars to publish or perish and at the same time offer them only publishing facilities which require subventions from their limited salaries. The Ford Foundation is setting in motion an exciting five-year program of subsidies for university press books in the humanities and social sciences. Most university

press directors hope that the Ford action will lead other foundations to a long-overdue recognition of their duty to subsidize scholarly publication as well as research.

The time is past when a competent university press of any stature can be sensibly directed on a part-time basis. Ten years ago, only a little over half the directors of presses in the Association could report that they had no other outside teaching or administrative duties. Today, every press in the Association has a full-time director, now a requirement of membership. Ten years ago, just over half of these directors came to their jobs from teaching or other university work, while today this is only true of a third; one in every four of these directors today came from commercial publishing, a marked increase in the past ten years. They are not paid as well as they were or would be in trade publishing—university press salaries are customarily keyed to academic scales—but they have presumably found their compensations, including pride of profession, satisfaction with their surroundings, and security.

What do the university presses publish? A few out-and-out textbooks, and even a few volumes of fiction, verse, and drama, customarily for good and sufficient local reasons. The bulk of their lists are made up of works of scholarship, books in which scholars are conveying to other scholars, in or outside their own fields, and to educated laymen, the results of their investigations and learning. Almost 80 per cent of these publications are in the humanities and social sciences. Another 15 per cent of university press lists is made up of books in the biological and physical sciences; this figure may be expected to increase in view of the new surge in the sciences but will always be held down by the fact that much of the results of scientific research is conveyed through journals rather than books.

On the average, each university press finds from about 40 to 50 per cent of its list among the scholars on its campus. The rest comes from outside, in large part from scholars whose universities have no presses or who prefer to migrate regardless of local publishing opportunities. Many presses deny any limitations to their fields of interest, while some others claim special interests. In a recent survey, Columbia, Cornell, Johns Hopkins, Princeton, and Yale showed strong interest in humanities and social sciences, while Chicago, Columbia, Cornell, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, and Princeton indicated a liking for the biological and physical sciences.[17] Catholic and Loyola publish heavily in the field of religion, as might be expected; Columbia re-

ported a new preference for works in the physical sciences, mathematics, and medicine, and Yale has lately announced moves to develop its list of science books. With a new subsidiary imprint, the Belknap Press, Harvard is on the lookout for books in the general field of American civilization. Duke has long had a special interest in Hispanic American studies. The most pronounced editorial preference among the greatest number of presses is, as one would suppose, their interest in regional material and certainly their contributions in this field have been impressive.

On the whole, university press books cost too much. Their chief market is among scholars who cannot always afford the price tags it has become necessary to put on such books. These high prices stem chiefly from manufacturing costs which, in the small runs that characterize scholarly publishing, have become prohibitive. Increases in printing materials and wages in the postwar years have been steadily passed along to the customer, meaning in the first instance the university presses; it has become their task to find subsidies or other means of preventing these costs from reaching the ultimate consumer, whether it be the librarian or the scholar. It is not unusual for a book manufacturer to charge a unit price of $3 for materials, composition, printing, and binding 1,000 or 1,500 copies of a 400-page book containing a not unusual amount of the scholarly apparatus of tables and footnotes. With discounts, promotion costs, royalties, and a reasonable sum for overhead, the university publisher cannot afford to price such a volume at less than $9 and a dollar or two more is probably necessary to break even. Stockholders and their profits are not his concern, it will be remembered. Obviously this price would be too high for the market to bear and something has to give; the author may have to part with royalties, illustrative matter may be restricted, and other corners are cut. Sometimes a subvention may be poured into venture, from press funds or university departmental sources, or from outside, or, worst of all, from the author himself.

This is not a happy picture and the problem has come under increasing attack in recent years. Typewriter composition, with unjustified right-hand margins and offset printing, has provided a partial solution, but the savings have not proved to be as great as were first surmised and the resistance to the appearance of a book turned out by these "cold type" methods is sizable, among reviewers and promotion committees, as well as authors themselves. At least a dozen university presses operate their own printing plants or have access

to university plants which can manufacture their books, and in these cases a greater control over costs, not to mention schedules is possible. But the problem of manufacturing economies persists even in these surroundings.

To make a frontal assault, the Association of American University Presses has just launched an extensive study of materials, methods, and equipment used in the production of the low-run scholarly book.[18] Ample funds have been provided by the Ford Foundation for this survey and if its results, which will be available in 1959, are as good as they are expected to be, some real progress may be in sight.

Meanwhile, university presses will and should continue to lead the way in the field of good design, which need not mean expensive design. Many university presses have long subscribed to the policy that they have an obligation to turn out well-made books. The annual Fifty Books Exhibition of the American Institute of Graphic Arts has seldom included less than half a dozen university press books in the past thirty years and once or twice the scholarly houses have taken a third of the prizes. Good design, several presses have found, pays as it attracts authors and buyers.

How do these university press books find their consumers? The increase of the total sales volume is partially due to higher retail prices. The demand for university press titles has grown with the postwar growth of the academic world and so has the ability to market their books. It is not always easy to persuade an author that a university press knows how to promote, advertise, and sell his book as well as a trade house, but commercial publishers are the first to admit that at least twenty university presses can do these things very efficiently indeed.

Some of the techniques have been borrowed from trade publishing. There was a burst of outright copying twenty or thirty years ago, which even led to sales combinations among scholarly and trade publishers, but gradually university presses have learned to adapt trade distribution techniques to their own special products. Regional combinations of university presses using the same sales force have sprung up all over the country and there is an increasing amount of talk among directors about the geographical and economic advantages of joint warehousing. Many presses use New York advertising agencies. When it seems suitable to advertise in the *New York Times* or the *Saturday Review* or *Harper's* or the *New Yorker* they do so with pro-

fessional skill. They also are the chief advertising support of many quarterly reviews and scholarly journals. Perhaps their greatest skill has been developed in the field of direct-mail, where through their own cooperative mailing lists or other special collections of names they have learned to ferret out the few people who will want to know of the existence of a new work of interest to them but not necessarily to many others.

No remarks about the distribution of university press books would be complete without acknowledgement of the growing market for these books in foreign countries. Approximately 11 per cent of all university press sales in 1955 were achieved outside the United States, a figure over double that for trade titles.[19] In the libraries of the rest of the world, an impressive number of American books bear university press imprints.

University presses have other tasks beside book publications. Nine presses handle the bulk of the scholarly journals mentioned above. Chicago handles some twenty-eight in all, Stanford nine, Duke, Johns Hopkins, and Toronto are each responsible for seven, and California, Catholic, Columbia, and North Carolina each for five. At ten presses the management is responsible for all university bulletins and catalogs, whether editing or printing or distribution or some combination of these. Columbia University Press managed until recently the university bookstore.

With one or two exceptions, no university press can make ends meet on its publishing operations and the problem facing each press is to bridge the gap between sales income and over-all expenses. In 1955 subsidies accounted for 23 per cent of every dollar of university press income.[20] These subsidies came in the first instance from parent institutions, which supplied almost 70 per cent of the need, with foundations adding 10 per cent and other outside organizations and educational institutions providing another 10 per cent. The author's share of the subsidy load dropped from 8 per cent in 1948 to 5 per cent in 1955. With the present Ford program and increased university aid this downward trend should continue.

University presses cooperate among themselves to a pleasant degree. In the past fifteen years, they have slowly developed an effective Association which offers a growing number of services, foremost among them an annual meeting where an astonishing amount of information and opinion is exchanged to good purpose. The Association is currently considering plans for further strengthening of its joint enter-

prises, including a complete quarterly checklist to be distributed to several hundred thousand scholars and libraries at home and abroad. Its exhibit program through which the latest university press titles are shown at library meetings and gatherings of academic associations, has become steadily more effective in recent years.

It is now almost ninety years since Andrew White made the first move. During the past twenty of these, American university presses have come of age. Today they constitute a permanent part of the American publishing scene and their role in helping scholars and educated laymen meet the tasks facing our society has become significant. This function was characterized several years ago by one university press director as the job of "closing the most dangerous gap in our national structure—the gap between knowledge potentially useful and knowledge put to work." The opportunity to perform this task capably and with effect is greater today than it has ever been.

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